A reminder that being a non-major doesn’t actually pose much of a disadvantage. As someone who wasn’t in Computer Engineering until Junior Spring, the only thing that changed when I got in was that I changed “Electrical & Computer Engineering” to “Computer Engineering” on my resume, which is honestly a net negative effect. I have a lot of friends that aren’t CSE majors and have had more internships than friends that are. I already had two internships by the time I switched into CS. The most important indicator of success in getting to work as a SWE full-time is hustle.

**Background/Ethos**: I got admitted to UW as an engineering student in 2018. I decided that I wanted to do CS spring of 2019 after taking CSE 142 (Intro to Programming). I had been placed into EE instead of CompE spring of 2020 (I hadn’t finished requirements to apply for either until then). I was rejected again from CompE in fall of 2020. I was accepted into CompE spring of 2021.

**Admissions:** This is all anecdotal, and I never worked as part of admissions, but I really wanted to get in so I put in a lot of effort into my application. This is what I gathered, take everything with a grain of salt.

The department has two categories for admissions, academics and personal. You are given a score in each of these categories by multiple (2-4?) reviewers. These scores are averaged among the reviewers and added together. This score is what’s used to determine whether you’ll be admitted or not. My guess is that they have some score X that they want new students to have.

***Academics***: This is mostly your gpa, specifically your pre-req gpa (your gpa including just the required classes to apply to the major), but also considers things like number of credits/classes taken in a quarter, rigor of coursework (i.e. honors classes) and gpa trends (i.e. improving gpa every quarter). They weigh math and cs classes the heaviest because they feel it’s the most indicative of performance in major-only classes, and they don’t want to admit people that aren’t going to do well in classes.

***Advice***: There’s not much to say other than take your math and cs courses very seriously. If getting in is important to you, let that motivate you to do well in these classes. I fully believe that anyone can 4.0 any class, and it’s a matter of organizing time and energy correctly. Math and CS both have dedicated TAs and study areas (Math Study Center and IPL) with additional resources (CLUE in Mary Gates, the Instructional Center-IC on west campus, the Engineering Academic Center-EAC, etc.). Prioritize your performance in these classes. If you’re struggling, talk to people, if you talk enough you’ll find people that did well or are doing well and can learn from that.

Know that it’s not the end of the world if you don’t do well. I had a friend who got a 2.6 in linear algebra, and I personally got a 2.8 in calc iii, but it was a lot harder for us to do because we had to do really well on our essays and ace future courses. I had a 3.7 in cal ii, 2.8 in calc ii, 3.1 in diff eq, and 3.5 in linear algebra. In my case, my gpa improved every quarter and in the last quarter before my last application I 4.0’d 2 of my 3 CS classes and got a 3.8 in the other one.

***Personal***: You score well if the reviewer thinks you should get in, and vice versa. There is definitely criteria, and it’s stuff you can find [online](https://www.cs.washington.edu/academics/ugrad/admissions/currentuw) in the essay prompt(s). It’s really important that you address what they’re talking about. Evaluating people is inherently subjective and any system that does that will try to be as objective as possible.

***Advice*:** The most successful essay pattern I’ve heard of is explaining why CS is going to help you do X better, where is some field you have experience and shown interest in. In my case, that was CS education. I have heard stories where X is music creation, music production, healthcare, sustainable energy, and bioengineering. I’m sure there are others. I think it’s a really powerful pattern because a lot of people get sucked into explaining why CS is their passion, and there’s a few reasons why that’s not good.

1. It’s probably not: CS is just an umbrella term to describe technology, and it’s broad. Passion is such a high emotion word, it’s super unlikely (maybe impossible?) that you’re passionate about everything in CS. So people making this claim usually say something that doesn’t make sense or isn’t believed.

2. It’s pretty obvious and non-unique you like CS: Something that everyone in the application pool shares is that they want get into CS, and it’s probably because they enjoy something about it. So going on and on about it isn’t unique and kind of redundant.

To be clear, you definitely need to explain why you’re interested in CS, but it shouldn’t be everything you talk about and it should be specific to you.

In general, your story should be specific to you. This means that you need to talk about particular experiences in your life and how those experiences make you one of the best candidates to study CS.